174824 - Biography of the Moghul ruler Aurangzeb; was he Salafi in his ‘aqeedah?

the question

May Allah bless you and raise you in status in this world and the Hereafter. I hope that you may do me the favour of answering this question: What is the truth about Aurangzeb (the Moghul emperor who ruled India)? Was he one of the followers of the path of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah (the Salaf)? Or was he like the rest of the Moghul emperors?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Sultan Aurangzeb’s full name was Abu’l-Muzaffar Muhiy ad-Deen Muhammad Alamgir, Sultan of the Moghal kingdom in the Indian subcontinent and environs. He was one of the descendants of Tamerlane (Timur Lang), the famous Mongol tyrant. He was born on 15 Dhu’l-Qa‘dah 1028 AH/24 October 1619 CE, and died on 28 Dhu’l-Qa‘dah 1118 AH/20 February 1707 CE.

The meaning of the name Aurangzeb in Farsi is “adornment of the throne”. Aurang means “throne” and zeb means “adornment”. The meaning of the title Alamgir in Farsi is “conqueror of the world”. He was the son of Sultan Shah Jahan, one of the greatest sultans of the Muslim Moghul state in India; it is he who built the famous Taj Mahal tomb; which is considered one of the wonders of the world, in which to bury his wife who is known as Mumtaz Mahal, the mother of Sultan Abu’l-Muzaffar (Aurangzeb), with whom he was deeply in love. Because of the severity of his grief for her, he was no longer fit to rule, so his son, Sultan Abu’l-Muzaffar seized power whilst his father was still alive, after fighting battles with his brothers.

Sultan Aurangzeb was not like the other Moghul sultans; rather what is known from his biography

is that he was a scholar, a devoted worshipper, an ascetic, pious and a poet. He followed the Hanafi madhhab with regard to minor issues, so he was not like the other Moghul sultans; rather he was better than all of them.

Among his great deeds is that he fought against innovations and myths. He stopped listening to music and singing – even though he was skilled in both – and he abolished idolatrous and innovated celebrations. He also abolished the customs of bowing and kissing the ground, which were done before rulers and kings before him. He issued orders that people should greet him with the greeting of Islam, as-salaamu ‘alaykum (peace be upon you), and perhaps this is what made some writers who hated Islam describe him as a fanatic. It may be this that made some people regard him as a “salafi” – and in all these matters he was undoubtedly a “salafi” – but in fact he (may Allah have mercy on him) was a Hanafi in terms of madhhab, and what is well-known about the Hanafis in that land is that they are Maturidis in terms of beliefs (‘aqeedah). Many of those who have written biographies of him stated that he was a Sufi. Allah knows best about him and his beliefs. There is nothing that we know about that for certain. What is most well-known in his biography is his deeds and his qualities such as his devotion to worship, asceticism and commitment to religion. His biographers have mentioned many good things in that regard. If we add to that his fighting innovations and myths, and his putting an end to Raafidi statelets, and his banning of innovated and idolatrous celebrations, it will become clear that he was a ruler who is deserving of respect and honour, and of supplications for good. What he (may Allah have mercy on him) did was a practical application of the methodology of the salaf in his rule, and he was what one of the literati – namely Shaykh ‘Ali at-Tantaawi (may Allah have mercy on him) – called a “remnant of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.” He wrote an important biography of him in his book Rijaal min at-Tareekh (p. 277-237), which he concluded by saying:

Allah guided him to do two things which none of the Muslim rulers before him had done:

Firstly, he did not give any scholar a stipend or salary but he required him, in return, to do some

work, such as writing books or teaching, so that the scholars would not take the money and become lazy, thus combining two evils, namely taking money undeservedly and withholding knowledge.

Secondly, he was the first one to compile shar‘i rulings into a single book, to be taken as a law. So the fatwas were compiled for him, on his instructions and under his supervision and care, and were written in that book. Hence the book was called al-Fataawa al-Alamgiriyyah, after him, and became well known as al-Fataawa al-Hindiyyah, one of the most famous books of rulings in Islamic fiqh, and one of the most well organised of works.

Rijaal min at-Taareekh (p. 236)

One of the Sultan’s biographers who lived closest to his own time – and he described him as a Sufi – was Abu’l-Fadl Muhammad Khaleel ibn ‘Ali al-Muraadi (may Allah have mercy on him), who died in 1206 AH. He said in his biography of him:

Ruler of India in our time, the ruler and leader of the believers, the pillar and guardian of the Muslims, the mujaahid who strove in Allah’s cause, the great scholar, the Sufi who had gnosis of Allah, the king who supported and defended the faith, who destroyed the disbelievers in his land, subduing them and demolishing their temples, and weakened their polytheism, and supported Islam and raised its banner high in India, making the word of Allah supreme. He collected the jizyah from the disbelievers of India, whereas previous Muslim rulers had not done so because of the strength and large numbers of the disbelievers. He carried out great conquests and did not cease launching campaigns against them; every time he headed towards a territory he would conquer it, until Allah took his soul whilst he was engaging in jihad. He spent all his time serving the interests of the faith and worshipping the Lord of the Worlds, by fasting, praying at night and doing other acts of worship; most people would not be able to do even some of what he did. That was by the grace of Allah that He bestows on whomever He will. He made good use of his time,

allocating separate time for worship, time for teaching, time for military affairs, time for listening to complaints from people, and time for reading books and reports that came to him every day and night from across his kingdom. He did not mix one activity with another.

To sum up, he was one of the shining stars of history; no one equalled him in administration of his domain, or even came close. Lengthy books were written about his rule and biography in Farsi and other languages; whoever wishes may read them.

Silk ad-Durar fi A'yaan al-Qarn ath-Thaani 'Ashar (4/113)

Then after that he said:

He took power in 1068 AH, and Allah willed good for the people of India. He abolished wrongdoing and unjust taxes, and his dawn rose from the Indian horizon as he emerged from among the offspring of Tamerlane; his reign was magnificent and glorious. He took as prisoners most of the famous kings of India, and their country submitted to him. Wealth was collected for him and lands and people came under his domain. He continued striving in jihad and never returned to the seat of his kingdom after he left it. Every time he conquered a new territory, he would move on to another. His troops were innumerable, and his greatness and strength cannot be described in words. All sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. He established in India a state that was based on knowledge, and he went to extremes in showing respect to people of knowledge until people came to him from all directions.

To sum up, he had no equal among Muslim rulers of his time in terms of good conduct, fear of Allah, may He be glorified, and striving in worship.

He instructed the Hanafi scholars of his land to collect in his name, fatwas that dealt with shar'i rulings according to their madhhab, and compile them in one book, which was called al-Fataawa al-'Aalamgiriyyah. This book became famous in the regions of the Hijaz, Egypt, Greater Syria and

Anatolia. The benefit of this book became widespread and it became a reference book for those who issue fatwas (muftis); it remained so until he died in Ahmednagar in the sacred month of Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1118 AH, and was buried in the graveyard of his forefathers. His reign lasted for fifty years, may Allah have mercy on him.

Silk ad-Durar fi A'yaan al-Qarn ath-Thaani 'Ashar (4/113)

For more information on his biography, please see what was written by Professor 'Abd al-Mun'im an-Nimr in his book Tareekh al-Islam fi'l-Hind (p. 286-288)

And Allah knows best.